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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000836

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2013

TAGS: PHUM HR HRPNUM

SUBJECT: ANOTHER PROBLEM SOLVED? -- CROATIA FLOATS NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ROMA

CLASSIFIED BY: POLOFF MITCH BENEDICT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: THE GOC INITIATED A COMMENT AND DISCUSSION PERIOD FOR A DRAFT NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ROMA IN MARCH, AND WOULD LIKE TO FINALIZE THE PLAN BY THE FALL. NGOS TELL US THE DRAFT PLAN IS A WELCOME EFFORT TO ADDRESS THE SEVERE OBSTACLES FACED BY THE ROMA IN CROATIA, BUT FALLS SHORT ON THE DETAILS AND FUNDING. PRONE TO RELY ON EXPRESSIONS OF INTENT WHEN IT COMES TO ADDRESSING BROAD SOCIAL PROBLEMS,  
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SUCH AS ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL STRATEGY, IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THE GOVERNMENT WILL TAKE MEANINGFUL ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ROMA IN CROATIA. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ANTE SIMONIC, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, ASSEMBLED A WORKING GROUP LATE LAST YEAR TO DRAFT A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ROMA. THE GOC OFFICE FOR NATIONAL MINORITIES IS PLAYING A COORDINATING ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY, AND HAS RECEIVED SUPPORT FROM OSCE/OHIDR AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE. ON MARCH 12 THE GOVERNMENT HELD A PUBLIC ROUNDTABLE TO PRESENT THE DRAFT NATIONAL STRATEGY, AND SIMONIC ANNOUNCED THERE WOULD BE A PERIOD OF PUBLIC DISCUSSION AND COMMENT BEFORE A FINAL REPORT WOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE GOVERNMENT. ONCE THE GOVERNMENT APPROVES THE REPORT IT WILL BE PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT FOR ADOPTION. MLENA KLAJNER, ACTING HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR NATIONAL MINORITIES, TOLD US THE NATIONAL STRATEGY IS NOT LIKELY TO BE ADOPTED BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR.

3. (U) THE DRAFT NATIONAL STRATEGY CONTAINS A LONG LIST OF LARGELY GOVERNMENT-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION, GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL WELFARE, EMPLOYMENT, INTERNAL AFFAIRS, CULTURE, AND HOUSING. THE PROPOSED ACTIVITIES CONSIST OF LONG-TERM, MEDIUM-TERM, AND SHORT-TERM TASKS THAT ARE TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS, NGOS, AND THE ROMA COMMUNITY. ROMA REPRESENTATIVES ARE TO BE SYSTEMATICALLY INVOLVED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT, AND THROUGH THE COMMITTEE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ROMA. THE COMMITTEE, TO CONSIST OF NINE REPRESENTATIVES OF RELEVANT MINISTRIES AND GOVERNMENT OFFICES, SEVEN  
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REPRESENTATIVES FROM ROMA COUNCILS, AND ONE REPRESENTATIVE FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS NGO, WILL MEET "AS NECESSARY" TO MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY.

4. (C) THE CROATIA HELSINKI COMMITTEE (HHO), THE MOST ACTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS NGO IN CROATIA WORKING ON ROMA ISSUES, TOLD US THAT WHILE THE GOVERNMENT IS WELL-INTENTIONED THE NATIONAL STRATEGY IS REALLY ADDRESSING "LUXURY ITEMS" RATHER THAN BASIC NEEDS, AND IS BETTER SUITED TO A DEVELOPED COUNTRY RATHER THAN CROATIA. HHO FURTHER FAULTED THE GOC FOR NOT TAKING A HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH TO THE DOCUMENT, AND FOR NOT INCLUDING ANYONE FROM OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT IN THE INITIAL DRAFTING. ON THE OTHER HAND, HHO PRAISED THE GOC FOR THE EFFORT, CITING IT AS THE FIRST SYSTEMATIC ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS FACING THE ROMA POPULATION IN CROATIA. HHO WILL CLOSELY MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY. "CHILDREN FIRST," A LOCAL NGO WITH LONG EXPERIENCE IN WORKING WITH THE ROMA, REJECTED WHAT IT TERMED THE "GHETTOIZATION" INHERENT IN SEPARATE SOLUTIONS FOR THE ROMA PROPOSED IN THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR PROBLEMS FACED BY ALL THOSE IN POVERTY. WHILE WELCOME, PROPOSED EFFORTS TO EXPAND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION WERE CRITICIZED AS NOT GOING FAR ENOUGH.

5. (C) ROMA NGOS SUCCESSFULLY HELD A FIRST CONGRESS OF ROMA IN CROATIA IN FEBRUARY 2003 AND UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTED THE NATIONAL STRATEGY. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO HHO, ROMA VIEW THE NATIONAL STRATEGY AS "TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT." AS A DISEMPOWERED COMMUNITY, ROMA SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT IS A GIVEN. UNFORTUNATELY, ROMA NGOS ARE FRACTIOUS AND NUMEROUS -- CERTAINLY IN COMPARISON TO THEIR SMALL NUMBER, PERHAPS 30-40,000 IN THE CROATIAN POPULATION AS A WHOLE -- AND HAVE  
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DIFFICULTY IN WORKING TOGETHER IN PURSUIT OF COMMON GOALS. NON-ROMA NGOS THAT ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED ON ROMA ISSUES ARE UNANIMOUS IN THEIR VIEW THAT THE ROMA ARE INCAPABLE OF EFFECTIVELY WORKING ON THEIR OWN BEHALF. BOJAN MUNJIN, WHO FOLLOWS ROMA ISSUES FOR THE HHO, SAID THE ROMA WERE A "SAD

AND DEPRESSED COMMUNITY" WHO ARE SO POORLY EDUCATED THAT THEY HAVEN'T "THE TOOLS OR IMPLEMENTS" TO FIGHT FOR THEIR RIGHTS. KLAJNER TOLD US THERE ARE OVER 50 ROMA NGOS, AND THAT A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF MONEY GIVEN TO THOSE NGOS ENDS UP IN PRIVATE POCKETS, AN ASSESSMENT SHARED BY MANY IN THE DONOR COMMUNITY. SHE SAID IT IS NOT UNCOMMON FOR DIFFERENT BROTHERS IN THE SAME FAMILY TO HEAD UP SEPARATE AND COMPETING NGOS.

16. (C) BLANKA SHEGOVIC, DIRECTOR OF "CHILDREN FIRST," HAS WORKED WITH THE ROMA COMMUNITY FOR AT LEAST SEVEN YEARS, ESTABLISHING PLAY GROUPS AND PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO HELP ROMA CHILDREN STAY IN SCHOOL. SHE TOLD US THAT FEW ROMA NGOS ARE ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY, BUT RATHER EXIST AS A MEANS FOR THE LEADER TO ESTABLISH A POWER BASE SECURED BY FUNDING PROVIDED BY DONORS. MANY ROMA DO NOT WANT NON-ROMA NGOS INVOLVED IN ROMA ISSUES. SHEGOVIC RECALLED AN ENCOUNTER THAT ILLUSTRATED THE POINT,

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	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OPIC-01	PA-00	PRS-00	P-00	SP-00
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AND LEFT HER SPEECHLESS: A ROMA NGO LEADER COMPLAINED TO HER "YOU ARE GETTING RICH ON OUR CHILDREN WHEN IT SHOULD BE US GETTING RICH ON OUR CHILDREN." MOST ROMA NGO LEADERS NEVER COMPLETED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND SEVERAL ARE ILLITERATE. OF THE ENTIRE ROMA POPULATION OF CROATIA, ESTIMATES ARE THAT NOT MORE THAN 100 CHILDREN ARE ATTENDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

17. (C) COMMENT: THE GOC HAS A RECORD OF TRYING TO ADDRESS BROAD SOCIAL PROBLEMS -- GENDER, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS, AND  
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NOW THE ROMA -- VIA NATIONAL STRATEGIES. INVARIABLY THEY DESCRIBE A LARGE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES, BUT ARE SHORT ON DETAIL, AND CONTAIN UNREALISTIC DEADLINES AND VAGUE LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY. IN ADDITION, FUNDING FOR ACTIVITIES IS USUALLY NOT ADDRESSED. THE ROMA STRATEGY INCLUDES SOME SPECIFIC BUDGET ESTIMATES; WE COUNTED OVER \$4 MILLION FOR ACTIVITIES IN 2003 ALONE, BUT THERE IS NO INDICATION WHERE THAT MONEY WILL COME FROM, OR IF THE GOC WILL BE ABLE TO ALLOCATE FUNDING FOR ACTIVITIES THIS YEAR. NATIONAL STRATEGIES SOUND GOOD IN THEORY, BUT AT THEIR BEST THEY REMAIN AN EXPRESSION OF INTENT -- WHETHER OR NOT THE GOC WILL FOLLOW THROUGH WITH CONCRETE ACTION ON ISSUES OF CONCERN TO THE ROMA REMAINS TO BE SEEN. END COMMENT.  
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